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AUTHOR Allen, Walter R.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This preliminary report summarizes findings from a study of over 400 black graduate and professional students on eight, majority white, state-supported university campuses nationally. Students reported high professional achievement goals and self-concepts, generally came from families displaying high levels of academic and occupational achievement, and reported above average undergraduate grades and rankings. The findings suggest that the experiences of black students in graduate and higher education are less than optimal. On measures of academic performance, social adjustment, campus race relations, and interactions with faculty, student responses were at best ambivalent--more often negative. Such findings should be seen in relation to the national decline in black student enrollments in advanced study degree programs since the mid-70s and the effect of this trend on the black community. Strategies for ameliorating the campus experiences of black graduate and professional students include: (1) attempts to achieve greater involvement of black students in the informal networks of training programs; (2) increasing the presence of students with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints, resulting in a more open institution sensitive to the special needs of black and other nontraditional student populations; (3) the creation of mechanisms facilitating their right to appeal unfair actions or decisions; and (4) ensuring equal access to important professional information and resources. (RDN)

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Preliminary Report
1982 Graduate Professional Survey,
National Study of Black College Students

November 1984

Walter R. Allen, Study Director
Angela Haddad, Research Assistant
Mary Kirkland, Research Assistant

# CAAS

## Center for Afroamerican and African Studies

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The University of Michigan Center for Afroamerican and African Studies,
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109, U.S.A.

# Preliminary Report
# 1982 Graduate Professional Survey,
# National Study of Black College Students

November 1984

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Mary Kirkland, Research Assistant

This report is one of a series from the National Study of Black College Students. This study examines Black student characteristics, experiences and achievements on a sample of 8 White and 8 Black state-supported university campuses nationally. Over 3,000 undergraduate, graduate and professional students are involved in the study. Funding for the study is provided by grants from the Ford and Mott Foundations. Allen is Associate Professor of Sociology and the Center for Afro American and African Studies; Haddad and Kirkland are graduate students in the doctoral program, Department of Sociology. For additional information about the study please contact: The National Study of Black College Students, 407 Lorch Hall, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 48109 (313) 763-5220.

## INTRODUCTION

Existing research on the experiences and background of Black graduate and professional students has been seriously lacking, despite their increasing presence at major universities. Although Black and White students face similar academic, financial, and personal adjustment problems, many of the experiences of Black students are unique to their minority status, and cultural heritage. As increasing numbers of Blacks attempt to take advantage of the opportunities provided by graduate and professional degrees, the need for reseach to understand the obstacles and challenges they face in these institutions will grow. Accordingly, this report discusses the results of a 1982 survey of Black graduate and professional students from eight predominantly White universities. Based on a variety of items from this survey, we will attempt to give an overview of these students' backgrounds, educational achievement, academic and social environments, as well as their interaction with White staff, students, and faculty at their university.

Recent research indicates that Black students have historically been underrepresented in the nation's graduate and professional schools. Successful court challenges from the end of World War II to 1960, which struck down de jure segregation (McNeil, 1983), and concerted mass actions on campuses by Black student activists, which challenged de facto segregation (Ballard, 1974), produced noticeable changes in advanced degree program enrollments. From 1965 to 1975 the proportion of Black students enrolled in

graduate and professional study increased rapidly, until by 1976 they comprised respectively 6 and 5 percent of all students. Cuts in federal funding to education and a generally worsening economic situation have combined since the mid 70's to depress the enrollments of Black students in advanced degree programs. From 1976 to 1980, for example, Black enrollment in graduate school dropped by 8 percent (NACBHE, 1982). At the same time during 1980 Black student enrollments in Law (4.3 percent) and medicine (5.7 percent) reached their lowest levels since 1972 (Lehner, 1980). The precipitous decline in the numbers of Black students pursuing advanced degrees threatens the very futures of Black communities. For these communities have traditionally relied upon advanced degree holders for leadership. It is imperative at this point that we involve ourselves in systematic, careful study of Black students attending graduate and professional school in order to identify factors which contribute to worsening enrollment trends.

Students for this study was drawn from eight predominantly White, state supported universities (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Eastern Michigan University; University of Wisconsin, Madison; University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Memphis State University; Arizona State University; University of California, Los Angeles; and State University of New York, Stony Brook). Participating institutions were selected on the basis of regional representations, diversity in proportion of Black enrollment and accessibility. A simple random sample with interval selection was drawn from computerized lists of graduate and professional students supplied by Registrars at the participating universities. Given the study's longitudinal design, the sample is disproportionately composed of first year

students (69%). The overall response rate for the study was 43 percent, consisting of 407 students. Women (60 percent) and students pursuing professional degrees (63 percent) are disproportionate in the sample. Just over a third of students attend universities in the South (37 percent), 18 percent attend school in the West with the remaining 45 percent attending schools in the country's North Central and Northeast regions.

The survey discussed here was part of an ongoing national study of Black college students. In 1981 and 1982 this study collected data on Black undergraduate, graduate, and professional students attending predominantly White state supported Universities. This year the survey expanded to collect data fro Black students attending eight historically Black universities. The scope of this study has been quite broad, gathering comprehensive information on the backgrounds, achievements, experiences, attitudes, and aspirations of Black students. Detailed information on the academic and social environment, as well as the special programs, facilities, and organization at the participating educational institutions was also gathered. It is impossible to discuss all of the information provided by this study, and thus we have attempted to present an overview of some of the more salient issues affecting this unique group of advanced students on today's college campuses.

We begin our discussion with a brief summary of students' pre-graduate/professional school backgrounds, to investigate various factors that may have influenced their academic choices and outcomes.

## Student Background and Characteristics

The graduate/professional students in our sample grew up, on average, in stable, urban, middle-class families. Most (69%) grew up in homes where both natural parents were present. Their parents' average yearly income was about $23,000, and the average number of siblings was four. All, but about one third, lived most of their childhood and teenage years in cities, and nearly half (42%) lived in large cities.

In addition to being stable, urban, and middle-class, these students' families can also be characterized as highly educated. About half of the students' parents (56% of the fathers and 48% of the mothers) graduated from high school. One-quarter of their parents (24% of the fathers and 25% of the mothers) had also earned bachelors degrees these students' siblings were also highly educated. Twenty-seven percent, of students' had at least one sibling with a BA; 19% had at least one sibling with a MA; and 11% had at least one sibling with a doctoral or professional degree. Given that these students are from families with such high educatonal achievement, it is not surprising thay they are in graduate/professional schools working on advanced degrees: 67% were working on master's degrees and 33% were working on doctoral or professional degrees. It was also not surprising that over half (57%) eventually expected to attain a doctoral degree.

The high educational goals of these students were equaled by their high professional aspirations. Almost a third (28%) of the graduate/professional

students in our sample said they would not consider themselves a "success" in their chosen profession until they are doing "better than the average person" in their field, and almost half (46%) stated they would not consider themselves a "success" until they were at the "top" of their chosen profession.

These students also appeared to have the high self-esteem and self-confidence necessary to attain their lofty educational and occupational goals. Nearly three-quarters of these students rated themselves as having least above average self-confidence (73%) and leadership abilities (70%). This self-confidence was not ill-founded, since most of these students were academically well-prepared for success in their chosen fields of endeavor. Over two thirds (70%) reported ranking in the top 30% of their undergraduate class, and 28% reported ranking in the top 10%. Furthermore, the mean undergraduate grade point average (G.P.A.) for this group was 3.06 (A=4.0), and 20% reported a GPA of B+ or better.

Students in this sample appeared to be culturally prepared to attend a large predominantly White educational institution. Almost half (48%) attended predominantly White undergraduate institutions (10% Black) while only a small group (31%) received their undergraduate degree from predominantly Black Colleges (76% Black). Also since most of these students (35%) attended fairly large undergraduate institutions (5000+ student), it is unlikely they found adjustment to the large size of their graduate institutions difficult.

Finally, the majority of these students report receiving financial aid. (69 percent), In most cases this aid came in the form of educational loans and graduate fellowship's. Roughly a third of all graduate and professional students report having received one or both types of aid. One half the students who receive financial aid reported this aid to be adequate to their financial need. With respect to supportive services, 72 percent of students report not using (or not having available) academic tututorial services. Of the majority who receive academic counseling on their program, half are satisfied with the advice received.

## The University Experience

### Academic Environment and Student Achievement

Aside from the need to make certain social and cultural adjustments, academics could easily be a potential area for difficulties in advanced degree programs. Despite reports of intense academic competition at their institutions, most students seemed ready and willing to adapt and succeed: less than one third characterized the academic competition at their universities as average, whereas the majority (61%) reported it as being "intense" or "very intense". Nonetheless, most students were not disturbed by such pressures: 55% felt "positive", 34% felt "neutral", and 11% felt "negative' about the level of academic competition at their university.

These students' adaptability and desire to succeed in their new environment was not clearly evident in their graduate GPAs. There was little

difference between the average GPA for professional and graduate students (3.21 and 3.34 respectively, A=4.00). The overall mean GPA for these students was 3.26, considered satisfactory in most professional schools, but slightly below average in advanced degree programs. However, a significant proportion of the graduate students (43%) did report a GPA of B+ (3.5) or better, generally considered satisfactory in most graduate programs. Apparently some students are having academic difficulties. Nevertheless, these students are on the whole doing quite well, considering that most are in their first year of graduate/professional school and are still adjusting to new programs, new universities and new academic requirements.

Another important aspect of success and integration in graduate/professional program is student participation in professional activities, and the establishment of student/mentor relationships. The findings from our study suggest a number of students are succeeding in these nonformalized areas. Over one-third (36%) reported reading a paper or making a presentation at a professional conference. Almost one-tenth of these students had a paper accepted for publication. Twenty percent reported having collaborated with a faculty member on research, and 12% reported having co-authored a publication with a faculty member.

Overall, these findings are fairly impressive considering most students in the sample are in their first year. However, the picture changes somewhat if we look only at the graduate/professional students beyond their first year

(differences between graduate and professional students are very slight and therefore are not presented here). Forty two percent of these students reported having presented a paper at a professional conference, a fairly substantial number. Nonetheless, only 12% had a paper accepted for publication and only a small percentage had collaborated on a research project (21%) or co-authored a paper (16%) with a faculty member. These findings suggest that a substantial number of students in our sample are not well integrated into their departments, and are therefore missing-out on a very important aspect of their graduate/professional training.

In conclusion, it appears that although the graduate and professional students in our sample are meeting the formal requirements of their programs, a substantial number have been unable to fully integrate themselves into the informal networks of the institutional system. Gaining access to these informal networks and establishing student-mentor relationships may be proving particularly difficult for these students not only because most of them are first year students, but also because they are Black in a predominantly White environment. Accordingly, we will now examine students' descriptions of the quality of interracial relationships and the overall racial climates at these institutions.

Black Student Relations with White Faculty

These students were ambivalent about the quality of their experiences and relationships with Whites at their university. This was reflected in

their evalualtion of relationships with White faculty, staff and especially with White students. Black student ambivalence was particularly evident in the contrast between how they evaluated personal interracial relations (positive) as opposed to their evaluations of overall Black/White relations (negative). Black student ambivalence also showed in the more negative evaluation of Whites' nonformal/emotive, as opposed to standardized/objective, behaviors. We begin by presenting specific findings for White faculty.

Students split fairly evenly in their characterization of "overall" relations between Black students and White faculty on their campus: 47% rated overall relations as "poor" or "very poor", versus 52% who rated them as "excellent" or "good". In contrast the majority of students evaluated their personal relations with White faculty as positive: 19% rated their personal relations as "poor" or "very poor", versus 80% who assigned ratings of good or excellent. Although, on the surface the responses to these 2 items appear inconsistent, an examination of items assessing specific behaviors and interactions with White faculty provide some explanation for the apparent inconsistency.

Specifically, the students were asked to assess whether White faculty "never, seldom, sometimes, always, or often": have difficulty relating to, avoid, unfairly grade, provide encouragement to, and show concern for Black students. Whereas more students positively than negatively assessed White professors on the grading and avoidance items, most students chose the sometimes response for the relating item, and more students chose the negative

response for the encouragement and concern items. These patterns reveal a contrast in evaluations between the more objective/required (e.g., grades or interaction) and subjective/nonrequired (e.g., encouragement or concern) behaviors of faculty. Perhaps the students sense a hesitancy by White faculty to give their "all," or at least as much to their Black students as they give to their White students. This result, taken together with a Neutral mean sum index average score of these five Black student/White faculty interaction items (X=2.95, where 1=very negative and 5=very positive), suggests contradictory evaluations of overall and personal relations with White faculty. The scores also reflect this Black graduate/professional student sample's sensitivity to a very subtle phenomenon, i.e., the incomplete integration of Blacks on White campuses.

Black Student Relations with White Staff

Student evaluations of Black student relations with White staff were similar to those for White faculty. Again, more students positively characterized their personal, as opposed to overall Black student relations with White staff: 74% characterized their personal relations as "excellent" or "good", compared to only 58% who chose the same responses for overall relations. Students were asked three questions on more specific staff relations. As before these more specific behavior items suggested that students' ambivalence was due to a perceived discrepency in White staff behaviors toward them versus White students.

Specifically, the three items asked students about White staff's ability to relate, show concern, and equitably treat Black students. Although most students evaluated White staff positively on the fair treatment and relating items, more students evaluated White staff as "never" or "seldom", rather than "often" or "always", showing genuine concern for Black students. An average mean sum index score of 2.9 on these 3 items (1=very negative, 5=very positive), further illustrates that Black student ambivalence over interacial relations on campus extends to White staff.

Black and White Student Relations

The students in our sample were finally asked to evaluate their relations and experiences with White students on campus. Once again, students tended to characterize personal interracial relations as more positive than overall campus interracial relations. Only 20% of students characterized personal relations as "poor" or "very poor", while 44% characterized overall Black/White student relations as such. For the most part, students were as ambivalent about Black/White student relations as they were about interracial relations with White staff and White faculty. The average mean sum index, score, composed of 3 items on specific Black/White student experiences, was 2.8 (1=very negative, 5=very positive). Specifically, the 3 items asked about White students' regard for Black students' academic ability, White students' avoidance of interaction with

Black students, and White students' treatment of Black students as equals.

Although not clearly illustrated in the average score for the mean sum index, these Black students were more negative about their interactions with White students than with either White staff or faculty. For all three of the items in the index, more students chose negative than positive responses: 38% negative versus 14% positive on the regard for academic abilities item, 37% negative versus 23% positive on the avoidance of interaction item, and 33% negative versus 26% positive on the treatment as equal item. Unlike their evaluations of specific behaviors for White faculty or staff, these students did not positively evaluate White students on any item.

Black students' more negative evaluations of interracial interactions with White students further suggests the problems they are perceiving tend to be rooted in nonformalized interactions. Since these two groups are peers, most interactions will tend to be informal and egalitarian. Thus, it is not surprising that evaluations of White students were more negative than evaluations of white staff and faculty, since interactions with peers are likely to be both more frequent and in less formal situations. It is also possible that since Black and White students are, or should be equals on all grounds (which is not the case with either White faculty or staff), these students conceivably have higher expectations for relationships with their White peers and are therefore harsher in judging them.

Racial Climate and Racial Discrimination

Student evaluations of on-campus interracial relations could not be characterized as clearly positive or negative. However, other findings in the

study more clearly suggest subtle patterns of racial discrimination and under-representation. First, an overwhelming majority of these students thought there were insufficient numbers of Black faculty (100%), staff (88%), and students (91%) at their universities. Similarly the majority of these students did not believe there were enough Black students (90%) or Black faculty (96%) in their particular graduate or professional program. Moreover, 44% of these students reported that there were no Black faculty in their programs. Our findings are especially important, given students' ambivalent assessments of White faculty, their positive assessments of Black faculty, and the lack of mentor-student relations in their program. Eighty-six percent of students who had contact with Black faculty evaluated their interactions as "excellent" or "good."

Secondly, an alarmingly large number of students reported having encountered some form of racial discrimination on their respective campuses (73%). In addition, 32% of students who reported encountering racial discrimination said it occurred "hardly ever" or "seldom," whereas 52% said it occurred sometimes, and 15% felt it took place "often" or "very often". Reported discrimination most often took the form of derogatory remarks (31%) and subtle forms of discrimination (31%).

The derogatory remarks reported included subtle "put-downs", as well as blatant hostilities. The more blatant remarks were often made by White students indirectly or in groups:

"My roomate in the dorm often used the term 'colored' and 'nigger'."

"While walking to a record store on a Friday night, I encountered a group of White males. As I walked past them, I heard one of them use the term 'nigger'... he wanted me to hear it."

Although not engaging in such blatant racial slurs, White faculty also showed their prejudice. However, they expressed it in more sophisticated, subtle remarks as this account illustrates:

"A professor with whom I worked and who was a true Southern White 'gentleman' (and had a disagreement with), told me he'd always gotten along with 'my people' and really understood 'us'. For the life of him, he really couldn't understand me... Guess I should have 'shuffled' more and argued less."

"The Dean of the Graduate School telling me that I should be grateful that they obtain money for my kind."

"You are the first Black that I've ever had earn an 'A' from me."

The subtle acts of discrimination included being treated in ways that implied Black students did not belong or where illegitimate members of the group:

"Being told that I could not take a nap in the main lounge of the dormitory even though everyone else does."

"I can't think of specific examples. It's just the atmosphere... students would rather sit in group of eight or nine around the video console than share the console with three Black/Hispanic students."

Treatment of Black students as outcasts was not confined to the dorms, it also happened in the classroom. Some students began to think they were invisible:

"On more than one occassion I have been completely ignored when raising my hand to ask a question... (I) was sitting right in front of the professor."

"In lab class a professor didn't answer my questions nor did he spend time around my table. But (he) answered White students with detail and spent time around their desk if they had questions or problems."

Discrimination and prejudice was often more blatant, resulting in undue hardship and unfair consequences for these students, as these quotes illustrate:

> "A faculty member (said) that I plagarized a paper because my standard English was not at the level of accomplishment to have written a paper of such sophistication..., so began the saga of his attempts to prove that Blacks are not prepared for higher education. It is an ongoing battle."
>
> "A professor said (all you minorities) better leave my class you're not going to pass, opening remarks to a calculus course."
>
> "In the classroom, the instructor was critical of and degraded minority students... She reflected her feelings in her grading."

The two most common types of discriminatory acts, derogatory remarks and subtle discrimination were just as commonly engaged in by White students as they were by White faculty members. There was no significant difference between these two groups, if we look only at the discriminatory behaviors of derogartory remarks and subtle acts. However, if we look at all types of discriminatory behaviors, White students were significantly more likely than White faculty to engage in all actions except grading discrimination. It is also worth noting that "other" (meaning other than White staff, students or teaching assistants), in other words town members, was the most common category of persons responsible for discriminatory acts.

No doubt these experiences, combined with previously discussed factors, prodded nearly half (46%) the students to feel as though they were "not at all" or "very little" integrated into the campus, and over a third (36%) to consider dropping out altogether. Only 8% of students believed

extracurricular activities to considerably reflect their interests. This probably contributed to the high number of students (52%) participating, at least sometimes, in Black organization - sponsored activities.

In light of these findings, it is not surprising that 80% of students disagreed with the statement, "Black students have the same problems as White students do at this university." It is also not surprising that 58% of nonmarried students are dissatisfied with their social life. What is surprising is that 41% of students said they "definitely" (and 37% said they "probably") made the right choice in selecting their current graduate/professional program. More interesting, two thirds (65%) have not considered leaving the university even though all have been at their institutions for close to a year, which was apparently long enough to see the less positive side. Nonetheless, if you consider these students' dedication to their degree program and education, as the following finding indicates, it is not so surprising: 75% said graduating was "very" or "extremely important" to them.

## Summary and Conclusions

This preliminary report summarizes findings from a study of over 400 Black students on eight, majority White, state-supported university campuses nationally. Students reported high professional achievement goals and self-concepts. To a large extent, student professional aspirations reflected family traditions, their parents and siblings displayed high levels of academic and occupational achievement. Students completed their

undergraduate educations in large, predominantly White institutions. Students also reported above average grades and ranks in graduating class for their undergraduate years.

The majority of Black students in our sample reported average grades in graduate and professional school. A substantial number experienced difficulties becoming integrated into the informal faculty-student and student-student networks of their programs. In general Black students were ambivalent about the nature of interracial relations with White faculty, staff and students on their campus. Many reported having encountered racial discrimination on the campus. Most often such discrimination was in the form of derogatory remarks or subtle slights. Predictably, over half the students felt themselves to be outside the mainstream of campus life. So much so that a sizeable proportion had considered dropping out of school.

It is risky to draw extensive conclusions from this preliminary description of data collected on Black students pursuing graduate and professional study in the United States. However, several important patterns are revealed, patterns which hold important implications. National trend data show that Black student enrollments in advanced study degree programs have been in steady decline since the mid 70's. With this trend expected to continue, it becomes apparent that for years to come there will be severe shortages of Blacks in key professional areas, e.g., medicine, law, computer science, business, humanities and the social sciences (Blackwell, 1981). It thus becomes imperative that the nation's universities strive to recruit, retain

and graduate larger numbers of Black students. But what of those Black students who are currently pursuing advanced degrees? What is the nature of their experiences on predominantly White university campuses?

Our findings suggest that the experiences of Black students in graduate and higher education are less than optimal. On measures of academic performance, social adjustment, campus race relations and interactions with faculty, student responses were at best ambivalent--more often negative. One wonders, therefore, about the overall quality of the educational experience for these students. Several strategies would seem reasonable for improving the quality of educational experiences (and presumably the acceptability of educational outcomes) for Black graduate and professional students. For instance, actions intended to achieve greater involvement of Black students in the informal networks of training programs would be helpful.

Students in advanced degree training programs benefit most when they are able to take full advantage of the professionalization process. Professionalization proceeds in large part through informal relationships where course content is supplemented with ongoing academic discourse, exposure to role models and involvement in profession-related activities. Where Black students are excluded from mentorship systems, where they are not regular members of group dialogues about the profession and where they do not participate in practical activities designed to supplement classroom preparation, then they are disadvantaged. Such disadvantages are very likely to carry over after graduation, resulting in these students' being excluded from the professional networks which ultimately determine career success.

Another strategy for improving the educational experiences of Black graduate and professional students would require their universities to become more culturally diverse in their composition and world views. More Blacks, and minorities will need to be brought into the university at all levels of the faculty, staff and student populations. By the same token, efforts to include other groups traditionally excluded from the university (e.g., women, low income people, the elderly) will need to be redoubled. Presumably the monolithic culture of universities will be changed by the increased presence of diverse backgrounds and viewpoints, resulting in a more open institution, sensitive to the special needs of Black and other nontraditional student populations.

Finally, the situations of Black graduate and professional students in large, predominantly White state-supported universities would be improved by the creation of mechanisms which facilitate their right to appeal unfair actions or decisions. Equal access to important professional information and resources must also be assured. This is a vital concern given the dynamics of large institutions. Research shows that bureaucracies or formal organizations, of which universities are but one type, are structured both formally and informally. The formal structure consists of written rules and practices which govern the organization's operation, while the informal structure consists of interactional patterns, individual behavior, 'common knowledge,' and informal lines of authority or action (Granovetter, 1973;

Perrow, 1979). How well a formal organization works to achieve its goals, therefore, is often determined by the characteristics of both its informal and formal structure. Generally speaking, one expects student adjustment, performance and outcomes to be most favorable where their understanding of, and access to formal and informal university structures is greatest. To the extent that Black students are 'outsiders' in their graduate and professional programs, they are less likely to be knowledgeable about informal practices and rules which their White peers routinely learn and use to great advantage.

Rather than providing definitive answers to pressing questions about the status of Black students in U.S. graduate and professional training, this report merely suffices to raise several intriguing questions. More indepth analysis of these data should yield clearer understandings of the educational experiences of Black students in advanced degree programs. These and a host of other issues will be addressed more systematically in a series of later reports.

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